

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMCONSUL PARAMARIBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1799

INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE VIA POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARAMARIBO 0455

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR MOPS PINS

SUBJECT: GUYANA-SURINAM BOUNDARY DISPUTE

REF: PARAMARIBO 428 (PARA 7)

1. RECENT FRACAS BETWEEN SURINAM AND GUYANA OVER ILLEGAL PRESENCE OF LATTER'S PATROL BOAT ON LOWER CORANTIJN RIVER BOUNDARY ADDED ANOTHER LAYER OF MISTRUST BETWEEN THE UNEASY NEIGHBORS BUT WAS OF INTEREST ALSO FOR THE WAY IT WAS EXPLOITED BY LOCAL POLITICAL FACTIONS.

2. WELL-INFORMED CONGEN SOURCES AGREE IMMEDIATE ROOTS OF FUSS LIE IN GOG REQUEST LAST MARCH THAT SURINAM PERMIT REGULAR GUYANESE RIVER PATROL TO PREVENT ILLEGAL BORDER CROSSING. AFTER REQUEST REFUSED OSTENSIBLY BECAUSE PATROLS MIGHT ALARM SURINAMERS ON BORDER, GOG RENEWED APPEAL LAST SUMMER ON BASIS ALLEGED ARMS SMUGGLING FROM FRENCH GUIANA VIA SURINAM OVER LOWER CORANTIJN. WHEN GOS DRAGGED FEET ON REPLY, DESPITE MINPRES ARRON'S ASSURANCES OF PROMPT CONSIDERATION, PRIME MIN BURNHAM OF GUYANA LOST
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PATIENCE AND IMPULSIVELY ORDERED PATROL BOAT UP RIVER.

FOLLOWING THIS, GUYANESE CONGEN KENDALL, REPORTEDLY CLOSE TO BURNHAM, CALLED IN BY LEFTIST ECON MIN BRUMA, TEMPORARILY IN CHARGE OF GOVT OWING ABSENCE OF MINPRES AND DEPUTY MINPRES, WHO RELAYED GOS DECISION FORBID RIVER PATROL AND TOLD KENDALL GUAYANESE PATROL BOAT NEWLY SIGHTED ON RIVER SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN IMMEDIATELY TO GEORGETOWN.

3. WHEN BURNHAM THEN CONDITIONED FUTURE SUGAR SHIPMENTS ON PERMISSION PATROL RIVER, GOS DID NOT LET REAL ANGER AT THIS OBSCURE THE FACT IT HAD BEEN HANDED EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY SHIFT PART OF BLAME FOR MUCH-CRITICIZED LOCAL SUGAR SHORTAGE TO BULLYING NEIGHBORS, MEANWHILE BREATHING PATRIOTIC INDIGNATION

OVER "BLACKMAIL." MINPRES ARRON CRITICIZED SUGAR-PATROL BOAT LINKAGE ON TV AND THE PRESS WARNED GOG "TESTING METTLE OF NEW SURINAM GOVT," AND TRYING ESTABLISH BY PATROLS WHAT AMOUNT TO SQUATTERS RIGHTS ON RIVER. "OUR OWN RIGHTS WORTH ONLY FEW BALES BROWN SUGAR" IN GOG VIEW, ACCORDING ONE ARTICLE WHILE ANOTHER STORY CHARGED GUAYANA WITH "EXPLOITING FOOD SHORTAGE TO GAIN TERRITORIAL CONCESSION."

4. GUYANESE CONSUL GENERAL ENDEAVORED PUT RECORD STRAIGHT AT PRESS CONFERENCE IN WHICH HE DESCRIBED HISTORY OF CONFRONTATION, IN ROUGH CONFORMITY PARA 2, BUT MAINTAINED GOS SHOULD COOPERATE ON PATROLLING RIVER SINCE GEORGETOWN SOLD SUGAR TO SURINAM AT CARICOM PRICES AT LOSS OF G\$400 THOUSAND. MOREOVER, GOS WRONG IN INSISTING BOAT BE RECALLED TO GEORGETOWN SINCE ITS DESTINATION ONCE IT LEFT CORANTIJN INTERNAL GUAYANA AFFAIR. HE ASSURED PRESS RELATIONS REMAIN FRIENDLY FROM GOG STANDPOINT, PREDICTABLY, MEDIA NOT IMPRESSED, DUBBED GUYANA "BAD NEIGHBOR" AND SCOLDED BURNHAM, "PEOPLE OF HIGH STANDARDS DON'T DO SUCH THINGS EVEN IF THEY MAINTAIN SELVES BY LARGE-SCALE ELECTION FRAUD."

5. MEANTIME, ECON MIN BRUMA, TARGET OF RISING CRITICISM BY BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND ANGRY HOUSEWIVES OVER MISSMANAGEMENT OF COMMODITY SUPPLIES IN EFFORT APPEAR AS CONSUMER'S CHAMPION, QUICKLY SAW IMBROGLIO AS WAY TO GAIN BACK SOME GROUND FOR HIMSELF AND LEFTIST PNR. PICTURED BY GOS INFO SERVICE AS MAN OF ACTION WHEN HE ORDERED PATROL BOAT FROM CONFIDENTIAL

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CORANTIJN, BRUMA NOW VIGOROUSLY ANNOUNCED HE TAKING IMMEDIATE STEPS RELIEVE SUGAR SHORTAGE "FOLLOWING BURNHAM REFUSAL DELIVER 300 TONS SUGAR IN ABSENCE PATROLLING RIGHTS." TWO TONS TO BE FLOWN IN FROM NETH ANTILLES IMMEDIATELY, PLUS BALANCE OF 500 TON ORDER FROM CURACAO TO ARRIVE BY SEA.

6. THROUGHOUT THESE EVENTS, OPPOSITION VHP CAREFUL TO REPEAT POSITION IN TOLD-YOU-SO VEIN THAT BORDER QUESTION MUST BE

RESOLVED BY DUTCH PRIOR INDEPENDENCE OR INCIDENTS THIS KIND BOUND TO REOCCUR WHEN COUNTRY ON ITS OWN. ADMINISTRATION NOT DOING ENOUGH IN THIS REGARD. VHP PROBABLY ALSO INSPIRED PRESS DIG AT DEPUTY MIN PRES VAN GENDEREN, EXPRESSING MOCK SYMPATHY HIS "EMBARASSMENT" OVER FACT HIS BROTHER (REPORTEDLY BODY GUARD AND DIRTY TRICKS ORGANIZER FOR BURNHAM) IN SERVICE OF THE ENEMY.

7. SQUALL FINALLY ABATED WHEN DUTCH CONSUL GENERAL AT GEORGETOWN (SURINAMER PERCY WIJNGAARDE) ARRIVED WITH PERSONAL LETTER FROM BURNHAM TO ARRON. WIJNGAARDE TOLD ME LETTER WAS DESIGNED TO SOOTHE, SUGGESTS WHOLE AFFAIR BE TALKED OVER IN FRIENDLY FASHION, AND EXPLAINS AWAY UNFORTUNATE SUGAR LINKAGE BY NOTING GOG COULD NOT SELL SUGAR AT CONCESSIONARY PRICES WHILE GOVT ENGAGED IN SUGAR NEGOTIATIONS WITH UK. BOTH BURNHAM & GOG FONMINGN SAID WIJNGAARDE, AGREE LOWER CORANTIJN RIVER IS IN SURINAM. HE NOTED THAT THERE IS NO APPARENT GOG EFFORT TO INTENSIFY BORDER PRESSURE WHILE GOS PREOCCUPIED WITH INDEPENDENCE ARRANGEMENTS.

8. COMMENT: GOS OVER-REACTION TO WHAT APPEARS AS ILL-CONSIDERED GOG EFFORT FORCE TALKS OR ACQUIESCENCE ON BORDER PATROL WAS CLEARLY STUDIED TO SOME DEGREE ALTHOUGH THE PIQUE WAS GENUINE ENOUGH. HAVING FOUND UNSOUGHT OPPORTUNITY SHIFT ABROAD SOME BLAME FOR POLITICALLY TROUBLESOME SUGAR SHORTAGE, BOUNDARY DISPUTE WAS QUICKLY EXPLOITED WITH SURE HAND. GOVT AND OPPOSITION BOTH GAINED SOME NOURISHMENT FROM THE AFFAIR, THE ONLY LOCAL LOSERS BEING THE GUAYANESE AND THE DUTCH: THE LATTER BECAUSE THE INCIDENT DEMONSTRATED THE ABSENCE OF SURINAM RIVERINE DEFENSES, A FACT THAT PROBABLY WILL RESULT IN DEMAND ON DUTCH IN DEFENSE NEGOTIATIONS FOR SUPPLY OF PATROL CRAFT.

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9. NOW THAT FEELINGS HAVE COOLED, REPLY TO BURNHAM LETTER IN WHATEVER FORM WILL PROBABLY BE TEMPERATE, SEEMINGLY FORTHCOMING BUT NON-COMMITAL IN ABSENCE BORDER UNDERSTANDING. GOS LIKELY BE UNDERSTANDING OF GOG POSITION IN AFFAIR AND WHAT LATTER SEES AS SECURITY PROBLEM IN GUYANA'S REPORTEDLY UNEASY CORANTIJN PROVINCE. (RECENT LOCAL ARMS SEARCHES MAY BE PARTLY DESIGNED TO SHOW GOS SENSITIVE TO GUYANA'S CONCERNS THIS REGARD.) MOREOVER, GOS WILL BE DEPENDING ON GUAYANA TO SUPPORT CARICOM MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND CONTINUATION OF SQUABBLE COULD JEOPARDIZE THIS.
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